



## PROTECTING MANGROVES THE NATURAL BARRIER

*Discover the remarkable efforts of Guangdong prosecutors in safeguarding coastal mangroves through public interest litigation*

Mangrove forests are like hidden treasures, brimming with biodiversity and bursting with productivity. They play a vital role in our planet's health, known as powerful carbon sinks, "coastal guardian" and "green lungs of the ocean".

China stands out as one of the few countries globally that has experienced a significant growth in the size of mangrove forests in recent years. Leading the way is Guangdong Province, situated along the South China Sea, boasting an impressive mangrove forest area of 10,600,000 hectares, ranking the top in the country in terms of mangrove forest size.

To protect this unique ecosystem, Guangdong has established three internationally recognized wetlands, two national-level nature reserves, three provincial-level nature reserves, and six national wetland parks. The world's first International Mangrove Centre is now located in Shenzhen city of Guangdong, following the conclusion of the 14th COP of the Convention on Wetlands. Meanwhile, the Zhanjiang National Nature Reserve in Guangdong has defied expectations by not only preserving its forests but also expanding their area. The achievement has earned praise from wetland experts worldwide, who consider it a shining example of successful wetland restoration. During his visit to Zhanjiang, President Xi Jinping emphasized the importance of protecting the mangrove forests, referring to them as national treasures that should be safeguarded with utmost care.

The province's prosecutors, too have been actively exercising their function of public interest litigation to protect the mangroves. They have set it their goal to develop ecological civilization in Guangdong the ocean province, with a focus on protection of mangrove forests. Through consultation, pre-litigation procuratorial recommendations, and public interest litigation, they have taken comprehensive measures to promote the preservation of these valuable ecosystems.



### I. Monitoring Programs for Key Areas

The Guangdong Provincial People's Procuratorate has taken action and addressed over 90 cases related to the protection of mangroves. These cases are being handled as part of special monitoring programs aimed at safeguarding the sea and protecting wetlands.

The prosecutors in Shenzhen Guangdong have called for the shut-down and demolition of various establishments in the country's sole national nature reserve situated right in the city center. These establishments, including car washes, petrol stations, and private schools, were found to be operating illegally by encroaching upon the precious mangrove wetlands in the Futian area.

The Zhanjiang People's Procuratorate and the Mangrove Forest Management Bureau have collaborated to launch a special surveillance program for the "Mangrove City." The initiative aims to promote the preservation and restoration of wetland ecosystems in Zhanjiang City, with the country's largest concentrated area of national nature reserves. As part of this endeavor, the Lianjiang People's Procuratorate of Guangdong has called on multiple departments to collaborate on a watershed remediation project, eliminating the risk from upstream pollution, which posed a significant threat to the survival of China's largest mangrove species, the sea holly.

In Yangjiang City, the District Procuratorate is urging competent authorities to take action against the growing problem of farming activities that are pushing the limits of the country's first river-type mangrove national wetland park. The goal is to implement comprehensive management, improve planning, and support the healthy development of the breeding industry, with a focus on agricultural products that are renowned nationwide for their exceptional quality.

## II. Building a framework for collaboration and coordination for comprehensive protection

In an effort to address the challenges surrounding mangrove protection and governance across different jurisdictions, the Guangdong Provincial People's Procuratorate has collaborated with Guangxi, Fujian, and Hainan provinces to establish a mechanism for inter-provincial collaboration on ecological, environmental and natural resources protection. Taking the lead, the Shenzhen Municipal People's Procuratorate has formed an alliance with their counterparts from Guangdong's Zhuhai, Huizhou, Shanwei, Zhanjiang cities, as well as Guangxi's Beihai, Fangchenggang, Qinzhou cities, and the cities of Haikou and Sanya in Hainan, to protect mangrove wetlands.

To tackle the issues of scattered accountability in regulation and the various causes for pollution, the Guangdong Provincial People's Procuratorate and the Provincial Forestry Bureau have established a collaboration mechanism of "forest chief + prosecutors". This mechanism allows them to work closely with other relevant departments such as the departments for ecology and environment, natural resources, and water conservancy to conduct joint investigations.

The Guangzhou Municipal People's Procuratorate and the Guangzhou Maritime Court have recently signed a document to enhance their collaboration on marine public interest litigation.



In addition, the procuratorates in Shenzhen, Zhanjiang, Yangjiang, and Jiangmen have taken the initiative to establish the first ecological protection alliance for mangrove forests and national wetland parks. They have also set up workstations for procuratorial public interest litigation and practice bases. Through this collaborative mechanism, they aim to work together to strengthen the protection of mangrove forests.

## III. Harnessing the power of technology and experts to enhance enforcement

In order to help coastal procuratorial authorities handle mangrove cases, the Guangdong People's Procuratorate encourage the prosecutors to use tech tools, such as blockchain repository, 3D modeling, satellite remote sensing, drone forensics, and big data analysis. A provincial drone management platform, regular

meetings, lectures by industry leaders, and hands-on tech training have all contributed to these initiatives.

A public interest litigation theory research base has been established by the Guangdong Provincial People's Procuratorate in collaboration with three universities. Similarly, Marine Procuratorate Research Institute was founded by the Zhanjiang People's Procuratorate in Guangdong Ocean University. The Nansha District People's Procuratorate of Guangzhou has also partnered with a national research institute to launch a maritime public interest litigation laboratory and set up a system to work with the Carbon Emission Trading Centre to discover how to materialize the value mangrove goods.

The costal procuratorates have also implemented a range of initiatives to engage the public. Over 3,000 dedicated individuals, including volunteers, prosecutors's assistants, and public interest litigation observers, have joined forces on the "Serving with Your Whole Heart" cloud platform. Their mission is to share key clues and provide technical support for the prosecutors in handling cases. Representatives and members of the People's Supervisory Committee have also been encouraged to actively participate in the on-site handling of cases. The Guangdong Provincial People's Procuratorate has also embarked on publicity campaigns to raise awareness about the significance of safeguarding mangrove forests, with the goal of rallying public support for this crucial cause.

